

Shalom: Egypt rejection of Lieberman unacceptable

Contributed by Egypt News
Tuesday, 27 October 2009

Vice premier meets with Egyptian ambassador to Israel, asks him why Cairo is against having foreign minister attend regional conference, according to ynetnews.com

Envoy says conference should be held when peace talks with Palestinians are launched

Vice Premier Silvan Shalom tried to find out Tuesday why Egypt is against having Foreign Minister Avigdor Lieberman attend a European-Middle Eastern convention.

Shalom met with Egyptian Ambassador to Israel Yasser Reda and told him, "This rejection is unacceptable to us."

The Egyptian ambassador replied, "At the moment the conditions are not ripe for convening such a conference. They may mature when the talks with the Palestinians begin."

During the meeting, held at Minister Shalom's office, the Egyptian envoy clarified that the reason for the decision to postpone the conference was an attempt to re-coordinate the event's date, in accordance with the re-launching of peace negotiations between Israel and the Palestinians.

He said Egypt seeks to hold the conference in the presence of heads of state, and perhaps even US President Barack Obama.

Reda told Shalom that Israel should bolster Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas, "because there is no other alternative."

Shalom responded, "We are working with the Palestinian in economic and political cooperation. Defense Minister Ehud Barak and the Quartet's Mideast envoy Tony Blair will soon inaugurate the Jenin crossing. Unfortunately, I see no desire to cooperate on the Palestinian side."

Egyptian sources have confirmed that Cairo refuses to send Lieberman an invitation due to his opinions and remarks against Egypt and its leadership in the past few years. "As far as we are concerned, the Israeli representation at the conference can be at a lower level," one of the sources noted.

Minister Shalom also met Tuesday with French President Nicolas Sarkozy's Mideast envoy Valerie Hoffenberg. The two also discusses the delay in the European Union's EuroMed conference, which was scheduled to convene in November, but will be postponed due to Arab countries' objection to Lieberman's attendance. Shalom told Hoffenberg that "such a situation is impossible."

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